

"You are standing this day, all of you before Hashem your G-d . . . that you should enter into the covenant of Hashem your G-d and into His oath." (29:9,11) - "Lest there be among you a man or woman whose heart turns away this day from Hashem our G-d, to go to serve the gods of those nations." (29:17)

The *Chofetz Chaim*, z.l., explains that the moment when Moshe stood before *Bnei Yisrael*, prepared to bring them into Hashem's covenant, was filled with trepidation and uncertainty. On the one hand, Moshe had shared with *Bnei Yisrael* Hashem's recognition of their lofty accomplishments. His statement of unconditional love for them reassured them of their future.

Immediately thereafter, however, Moshe admonished them regarding the individual Jew who might have been leaning towards idol worship. This individual's deviation from Hashem could fester, bringing ruin to a whole nation! This seems unreal! How could an entire community fall victim to the folly of one individual?

The *Chofetz Chaim* explains that this is reality. That which seems foolish in the beginning evolves into a tolerated lifestyle. This accepted standard of living becomes normative. If the individuals are communal leaders or scholars -- role models -- this process of acceptability progresses even more rapidly. Consequently, Moshe saw fit to caution *Bnei Yisrael*. After living in Egypt and witnessing the most decadent behavior, it was conceivable that a complacent attitude could develop among members of *Bnei Yisrael*.

Thus, Moshe reprehended, "*Lest there be among you a man or woman... whose heart turns away from Hashem.*" We are all gathered here because of that single Jew. Never forget the value of a single Jew! If the community does not concern itself with the single Jew, then everyone will be held accountable. We derive this from the end of Moshe's speech, in which he said, "*And they went and served other gods.*" Moshe now spoke in the plural, rather than in the singular. If the community does not look out for the individual, it is considered as if they all were also involved in the transgression.

Horav Y. Abramsky, z.l., notes that the importance of an individual has far reaching implications, especially in spiritual matters. He explains that at times one can deliver a profound lecture or *mussar* discourse before a large gathering, but only one person will grasp the message of the lecture. Imagine that one can teach a class for a period of time. Even if only one student has been affected, it becomes well worth every minute of effort expended with the entire group!

As we search for *zechusim*, merits, during these days of awe, it would serve us well to concern

ourselves with the individual Jew who falls between the cracks while we attempt to save the community!